DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 248 631 EC 170 409

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TITLE A Program for Prevocational Instruction for Adolescents with Severe Behavioral Disorders.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Minnesota Conference on Programming for the Developmental Needs of Adolescents with Behavioral Disorders (Minneapolis, MN, Fall, 1982). Contained in EC 170 401.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Basic Skills; *Behavior Disorders; *Interpersonal Competence; *Prevocational Education; Program Descriptions; Secondary Education; Work Experience Programs

ABSTRACT

The article presents a detailed description of an integrated program that includes functional life-related academics, social skills training, and both simulated and actual time-limited work experience for severely behaviorally disordered youngsters (5-17 years old). The academic-remedial curriculum focuses on instruction in areas deemed essential to future vocational success. The social skills curriculum includes goals of following directions, appropriate language, interacting with peers and adults, and developing self-control. The prevocational component uses either simulated or time-limited work experience to emphasize work-related concept learning. (CL)

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A Program for Prevocational Instruction for Adolescents with Severe Behavorial Disorders

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ABSTRACT

There is a growing concern over the absence of prevocational programs for behaviorally disordered adolescents. Although the literature reflects a recent interest in secondary programs, limited information is available to guide the development of service delivery systems. This article presents a detailed description of an integrated program that includes functional life-related academics, social skills training, and both simulated and actual time-limited work experiences for severely behaviorally disordered youngsters.

Recently there has been a tremendous surge of interest in secondary level programs for behaviorally disordered adolescents (e.g., Brown, McDowell, & Smith, 1981; McDowell & Brown, 1978; Meisinger, 1977; Nelson & Kauffman, 1977). For years, secondary programs have tended to emphasize skills required to function successfully at the college level (McDowell & Murphy, 1979). Much of the literature that pertains to alternative programs for the behaviorally disordered remains mere rhetoric, not yet in actual practice to guide the development of service delivery models (Kauffman, 1977). And yet, if these youth are to be successfully integrated into the community, instruction must be geared toward providing functional learning experiences. Many BD adolescents not only need job-related training but also need instruction in skills necessary to sustain positive interactions with co-workers, supervisors, and the public (e.g., Adams, Strain, Salzburg, & Levy, 1979). Unfortunately, even with the growing number of educational programs available for this population, training practices are rarely presented in a way that encourages widespread replication and evaluation (Nelson & Kauffman, 1977). What follows, therefore, is a discussion of components that together represent a prevocational program conducted in a psychiatric setting for severely behaviorally disordered adolescents.

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Participants and Setting

Youngsters participating in the prevocational program range in age from 15 to 17 years. Problems leading to residential placement include aggressive acting-out behavior, immature withdrawn behavior, self-injurious behavior, theft, chronic disruption or school avoidance, sexual acting-

TABLE 1
Overview of Prevocational Program

ENTRY	**Phase I**	**Phase II**		EXIT
	General Remedial Education Sequence	Related Educational Sequence	Public School VocEducational Placement	Discharge
— Evaluation				
— Develop IEP				
— Orientation	(see Table 3)			
	PreVocational (General)	PreVocational (Specific)	Workstudy Program	Secondary Vocational Training or Community Employment
	(see Table 4)		Community Employment	

Adaptive Social Skills Sequence
(see Table 2)

Reintegration into a
Regular Educational Program

Adapted from McDowell & Brown, 1978

out, runaway, and other delinquency status offenses. Participants evidence pronounced academic retardation in relationship to intellectual ability.

The prevocational program is conducted in the campus school of a residential psychiatric facility located in Leesburg, Virginia. The program staff consists of a certified special education teacher, teacher's aide, and dietary, maintenance, and woodshop personnel.

Program Description

A significant body of information is available regarding educational services for elementary-aged children exhibiting a wide range of emotional/-behavioral disorders (e.g., Hewett, 1968; Kauffman, 1977; Long, Morse, & Newman, 1976). Less is known about the content and instructional procedures associated with appropriate education for the seriously disturbed adolescent (e.g., Brown et al., 1981; McDowell & Murphy, 1979). The relevance of most traditional curricula in meeting the needs of secondary-level youngsters has been seriously questioned (Nelson & Kauffman, 1977). In that a number of behaviorally disordered adolescents will be judged on vocational (rather than academic) skills (Adams et al., 1979), the prevocational program to be discussed is comprised of three major components: (a) academic-remedial curriculum, (b) social skills curriculum, and (c) prevocational training/work experience (see Table 1).

In each of the components, instruction is based on emerging principles of educational technology applied to promoting a functional link between learner capabilities and the projected demands of community employment. Precisely, instructional activities are organized according to (a) entry-level skills of participants, (b) subskill sequencing of learning experiences, (c) criterion level of desired performance, (d) multiple evaluation procedures, and (e) remediation exercises as needed. Finally, instruction is geared toward promoting the principle of appropriate practice (Kerr & Gable, 1977). That is, training is arranged so that participants are called upon to repeatedly demonstrate mastery of selected skills in as close proximity to real life application as possible.

Academic-Remedial Curriculum

The academic curriculum reflects both a special class curriculum and one devised to provide specific academic-remedial instruction in areas deemed essential to future vocational success; e.g., computational math, reading comprehension, spelling, and handwriting. For example, functional math skills are paired with language-arts skills that, in turn, are correlated with instruction found in most units of prevocational training. In this manner, high frequency behavior such as "proficiency in making change" is emphasized (see Table 2). Concurrently, sight-word exercises devoted to vocabulary building in the use of coin-operated machines, pay telephones, public transportation, and food stores, for instance, are provided. Instructional units integrated in a similar manner include community living, personal hygiene and health, and money management. In order to enhance the usefulness of instruction, multiple variables incorporated into each major unit of instruction include (a) topography of response, (b) setting(s) exhibited, (c) acceptability criterion, (d) measurement/evaluation procedures, and (e) intervention strategies.

During initial stages of instruction, competencies related to overall

TABLE 2
Sample Social Skills Curriculum

Topography of Behavior	Setting(s) Exhibited	Acceptability Criterion	Measurement Method(s)	Intervention
I. *Greeting Friends:* a. Saying "hello" b. Saying person's name c. Asking about a person's health d. Shaking hands e. Saying goodbye f. Appropriate affect accompanying about	School, home, public location	All elements (a-f) of *Greeting Friends* exhibited in proper order three consecutive times across each setting. Weekly follow-up probes.	Direct observation self-monitoring	Role-play, rehearsal, *invivo* practice, video-models of appropriate behavior.
II. *Requesting Help/ Directions* a. Raising hand and waiting for recognition (school) b. Requests for help (verbal) understand	School, home, public location	All elements and subparts exhibited in proer sequence three times across each setting. Weekly follow-up probes.	Direct observation self-monitoring	Role-play, rehearsal, *invivo* practice, video-models of appropriate behavior

employability are introduced and serve as a foundation for subsequent teaching in a variety of prevocational areas. A detailed analysis of subskills which together comprise employment competency (for instance, in a food store or day care center) is developed and validated *in situ* through direct observation either by the instructor or students themselves. Then, community employers (such as a day care center director) are engaged in assessing the appropriateness of instructional units. In this way, the academic curriculum is designed to offer program participants functional, life-related skills. Finally, participants are evaluated daily according to the following:

1. *Academic involvement.* Amount of participation (the appropriateness of which is linked to the format of instruction and desired response), and oral recitation or written responses, with two or fewer verbal prompts required to maintain specified responses during that segment of instruction.

2. *Work quality and attitude.* Amount of work completed with at least 90% accuracy, attentiveness to mastering familiar material and acquiring new knowledge or skills, and the absence of negative verbal statements about instructional or mode of presentation by instructor(s).

3. *Self-maintenance.* Arrival at the scheduled time and place; obtaining materials required for appropriately engaging in learning tasks (e.g., gets work folder from distribution area); submission of completed assignments according to routine; and following daily schedule of modified curricular instruction (see Gable & Strain, 1981).

Social Skills Curriculum

An ample body of evidence to show that failure of disturbed adolescents job-related placements is often directly linked to poor social-interpersonal skills has accumulated (Adams et al., 1979; Kauffman, 1977). The purpose of the social skills curriculum is to assist student in developing successful and appropriate social interactions with others. For many youngsters, a major goal is to exercise greater self-control; for others, the focus is on initiating and sustaining acceptable social behavior in a work-related situation. Although many behaviorally disordered adolescents possess a range of social skills, they sometimes either fail to initiate such behavior or are unable to discriminate when such responses are acceptable. Additional instruction in this area consists of discrimination training by repeated practice of prosocial initiations across persons and settings. On an individual basis, youngsters evidencing either behavioral excesses or deficiencies receive training intended to minimize problems that would otherwise adversely effect employment success. A variety of procedures — role playing, simulation, systematic desensitization, modeling — lend themselves to this area of instruction with this population of youngsters, and have been effectively documented (e.g., Warrenfeltz, Kelly, Salzberg, Beegle, Levy, Adams, & Crouse, 1981). Social-interpersonal goals which pertain to simulated or actual work-related experiences and serve as the basis for daily evaluation are:

1. *Follows directions:* Promptly complies to adult requests or appropriately responds to direct interrogative statements.

2. *Appropriate language:* Initiates appropriate comments in classroom/work setting and refrains from disruptive verbalizations, or otherwise unacceptable language.

3. *Interactions with peers:* Initiates appropriate interactions and

TABLE 3
Sample Academic Curriculum

Topography of Behavior	Setting(s) Exhibited	Acceptability Criterion	Measurement Methods	Interventions
I. Sales Clerk Math Items (beginning level) a. List value and equivalent coins of different amounts of money	School (seat-work) School (workshop)	100% correct for three consecutive days. Weekly follow-up (100%)	Direct observation of verbally expressed orders, and equivalents and counting. Permanent product of written equivalents and counting sequence.	a) Didactic presentation of values and equivalents. b) Group oral identification of values and counting. c) Drill and seat-work on values, equivalents and counting. d) Identifying values, equivalents and counting with play money

TABLE 4

Sample Prevocational Curriculum

Topography of Behavior	Setting(s) Exhibited	Acceptability Criterion	Measurement Method(s)	Inverventions
I. Generic Prevocational a. Arrive on time b. Leave on time c. Start work immediately d. Sign in e. Sign out f. Task behavior 1. Work 30 minutes 2. Talk about task at hand 3. Remain with assigned task 4. Leave with permission 5. Respond to instructor 6. Finish task in allotted time g. Co-worker interaction 1. Talk in pleasant tones 2. Factual statements 3. Give feedback/approval h. Customer interaction 1. Offering assistance 2. Providing information 3. Talk in pleasant tones 4. Get assistance from supervisor	School (workshop)	80% (4 of 5 days) performance of each behavior (a-h) every week enrolled	Direct observation self-monitoring and videotapes	a) Written performance contract b) Model videotapes c) Role-playing d) Peer-feedback
II. Sales Clerk-Cash Register Unit a. Identify and define decimal and columbus	School (workshop)	100% performance on each item for three consecutive trials across three consecutive days.	Direct observation of students Permanent product from register.	a) Didactic presentation and demonstration b) Group oral and worksheets

responses to peer(s) in a manner which conveys acceptance and respects rights and belongings of others.

4. *Interactions with adults:* Initiates appropriate interactions and responds to adults in a manner intended to demonstrate compliance.

5. *Self-control:* Self-regulates verbal and motor responses directed to peers or adults — that is, refrains from negative behavior and participates in maintaining the physical setting in its desired state.

Prevocational Curriculum

The final component of the prevocational program emphasizes concepts associated with the world-of-work by means of either simulated or time-limited work experience. Job-related behavior such as cooperativeness, attitude toward constructive criticism, job performance, attendance, and punctuality are emphasized.

Instructional modules are arranged so that students have ample opportunity to engage in behavior closely aligned with the task of mastering selected employment-related activities, ranging from seeking employment opportunities to actual work expriences. For example, exercises have been developed which include: (a) using classified ads, (b) using telephone directories, (c) completing accurately and legibly multiple application forms, and (d) engaging in multiple simulated job interviews (McGee, 1981).

Rather than introducing occupational alternatives solely by means of discussion (an instructional approach shown to be less than optional), an extended period of time is afforded youngsters to perform tasks in order to acquire and demonstrate general job-related social and/or functional academic skills, and to become aware of the expectations of specific jobs. For example, students participating in a carpentry module engage in pre-assessment exercises, then in both didactic instruction and field application of skills associated with carpentry. Once students have attained mastery of required skills, they are placed in an intensified work experience. That is, for a 5- to 20-day period, opportunity is provided to repeatedly demonstrate newly acquired skills in an applied situation (the center's woodshop). Instructional units have been devised or adapted (see Adams et al., 1979) for the occupations of carpenter, kitchen/restaurant worker, maintenance assistant, child care aide, and clerk. Each unit calls for instruction in (a) vocabulary and terminology, (b) equipment and tool identification and usage, and (c) the mastery of the subskills of motor and verbal responses which together represent basic competency. It should be pointed out that the aim is not to produce a master carpenter but rather to develop concepts associated with a range of employment opportunities.

Ultimately, the training process leads to actual time-limited work experiences offered by the facility and the community. More precisely, one or more of the following forms of employment can be matched to a participant's interests and capabilities:

1. Center-sponsored on-grounds employment in dietary maintenance, and carpentry sections
2. CETA-sponsored, on-grounds or community-based employment (highway maintenance, instructional aide)
3. Voluntary placement in community-based preschool program for handicapped children

4. Community-based employment in markets, fast food restaurants, and other businesses.

Participant Evaluation

Participant evaluation occurs on a continuous basis and consists of the multiple administration of both standardized and informal instruments. More precisely, standardized achievement tests, criterion-referenced assessments, direct observation, and consumer evaluation procedures are applied to each aspect of the training program. First, administering of a standardized test (i.e., *California Achievement Test)* on a pre- and post-test arrangement, yields grade equivalent scores requested by the public school sector upon discharge. Second, performance of participants is linked to each subskill objective introduced, not only in the academic-remedial but also the social skills curriculum. This is accomplished by a series of criterion-referenced measures. Skills that present difficulty are singled out for repeated instruction; those mastered are dropped. Third, a series of direct observation protocols are employed to record and systematically assess behavior exhibited in simulated and real-life work experiences. Finally, work-site evaluation in the form of checklists and observations completed by employers is supplemented through administration of structured supervisory interviews. In this way, skill deficiencies can be corrected through the introduction of intensified remedial instruction coupled with practice and feedback exercises. By maintaining the evaluation process across time and settings, it is possible to determine not only the success with which job-related skills are transferred, but also their durability in various work situations.

Formative evaluation at the conclusion of the first year of operation suggests that participants (a) showed academic gains of from 1.1 to 3.4 years in selected curricular areas (as measured by the *California Achievement Test),* (b) maintained an acceptable level of work performance and behavior in 94% (31 of 33) of the placements, and (c) obtained satisfactory evaluations for employment in 100% (3 of 3) of community placements. Of the three youth discharged at the conclusion of the spring term, one was enrolled in the Job Corps and another scheduled for further vocational-technical training.

In a different vein, anecdotal reports maintained daily in both the prevocational and residential programs showed that participants evidenced more age-appropriate behavior and responsibility for physical appearance and personal property. And, 9 of 13 youth attained improved ratings on a facilitywide, four-level evaluation program. Insufficient data were obtained to establish a functional link between the prevocational program and improved participants' performance. Still, in recognition of the situation-specific quality of disordered behavior (Gable & Strain, 1981), gains evidenced across clinically-significant settings are encouraging.

CONCLUSION

There is ample support for the opinion that the development, implementation, and evaluation of programs designed to promote vocational adjustment (e.g., Nelson & Kauffman, 1977) should be a major priority for behaviorally disordered adolescents. While programs for the mentally and multiply handicapped have been widely investigated, an empirical base for secondary programming for behaviorally disordered youngsters

in the area of vocational adjustment remains scant. Still, a multifaceted approach which not only takes into account a range of instructional needs but also the principle of appropriate practice appears worthy of more rigorous investigation.

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